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United States General Accounting Office

Briefing Report to Congressional
Committees

June 1999

COMBATING TERRORISM

Analysis of Federal Counterterrorist Exercises



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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and
International Affairs Division

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June 25, 1999

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Christopher Shays
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security,
Veterans' Affairs, and International Relations
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

Terrorist attacks against U.S. personnel and interests domestically and abroad highlight the need for effective U.S. efforts to combat terrorism. U.S. policy and implementing guidelines call for robust, tailored, and rapidly deployable interagency teams to conduct well-coordinated and highly integrated operations. Federal agencies enhance their ability to respond to terrorist incidents by conducting exercises that train key personnel and test response plans. We recently briefed your staffs on our analysis of federal counterterrorist exercise data that we had gathered in producing our February 1999 classified report to you. This report summarizes the contents of those briefings. Our objective was to determine the numbers, types, scenarios, and participants involved in federal counterterrorism exercises conducted from June 1995 to June 1998.

Background

Presidential directives assign leadership and supporting roles to various federal agencies. Federal agencies' activities to combat terrorism include responding to a terrorist crisis and managing the consequences after a terrorist attack. Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 39, issued in June 1995, required key federal agencies to ensure that their counterterrorist capabilities are well exercised. Counterterrorism exercises include tabletop exercises, in which agency officials discuss scenarios around a table or other similar setting, and field exercises, where agency leadership and operational units actually deploy to practice their skills and

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coordination in a realistic field setting. One of the highest priorities in the federal government is to prepare for terrorist attacks involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD).¹

Results in Brief

Federal agencies conducted 201 counterterrorism exercises in the 3 years following PDD 39. The number of exercises per year more than tripled over the 3-year period, with the largest increase in the last year. Agencies used a variety of types of exercises and scenarios during this period. More than half of the exercises were field exercises (where command and response personnel actually deployed with their equipment), and the rest were tabletop exercises (where personnel discussed a particular scenario). Very few of the exercises included no-notice deployments of personnel and equipment. Over one-half of the exercises dealt with managing the immediate crisis resulting from a terrorist incident, including stopping a terrorist attack, while the others dealt with managing the consequences of the incident, such as caring for the injured. Until recently, very few exercises dealt with the likely situation of both crisis and consequence management occurring simultaneously. More than two-thirds of the exercises had WMD scenarios, while the others had more traditional and more likely terrorist scenarios involving conventional arms and explosives. Over half of the WMD exercises used scenarios that used chemical agents.

There was a variety of participants in these exercises. More than two-thirds of the exercises included more than one federal agency and almost one-half of them included three or more federal agencies. Some exercises also included participants of organizations other than federal agencies. For example, one-third of the exercises included state and/or local government participants, almost one-tenth of them had nongovernmental participants, and a few had foreign government participants. Federal agencies played various roles in these exercises, depending on their roles and their level of participation.

¹For the purpose of this report, we define WMD as chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons or agents. Within the federal government, there is disagreement as to the precise definition, especially whether large conventional explosives should be included.

This report contains no recommendations. However, in our February 1999 classified report on interagency counterterrorist operations, we made five recommendations to several agencies to improve counterterrorist exercises.²

Agency Comments

We received oral comments from the Department of State, the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). In general, these agencies stated that the report was an accurate reflection of federal counterterrorist exercises conducted in the period we reviewed. Many of these agencies provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

The FBI commented that the report was an accurate empirical survey of federal counterterrorist exercises. However, the FBI believed that clarification would be beneficial in four areas: tabletop exercises, state and local participation in exercises, no-notice exercises, and our methodology to collect and analyze exercises led by federal agencies. The FBI said that tabletop exercises can sometimes take months to prepare for and that it was sometimes difficult to get state and local officials to participate in federal exercises. We changed the text to reflect these comments.

Regarding no-notice exercises, the FBI noted some of the difficulties involved in conducting these type of exercises in a domestic scenario. According to the FBI, no-notice exercises, especially those broad in scope, can be disruptive to an agency's normal functions and daily responsibilities. It noted that the FBI's ability to dedicate resources and personnel to no-notice exercises is limited by its primary mission to investigate violations of federal law. According to the FBI, the primary goal of the exercise program should be to train the participants in the crisis management process, not to test how fast they can respond to a no-notice exercise. PDD 39 and the guidelines and plans that implement it call for robust rapidly deployable interagency teams. Thus, we believe that it is also

²For an unclassified summary of this report, see Combating Terrorism: Issues to Be Resolved to Improve Counterterrorist Operations (GAO/NSIAD-99-135, May 13, 1999). This summary, however, does not contain our recommendations because they were classified.

important to test how fast federal teams can respond to a no-notice event. Such exercises could lead to improvements in recall and deployment procedures to ensure that state and local first responders receive federal assistance as soon as possible. Along these lines, the Senate Committee on Appropriations recently directed the Attorney General to conduct no-notice exercises with domestic scenarios that include the participation of all key personnel who would participate in the consequence management of a major terrorist event involving the use of a chemical, biological, or cyber weapon.

Regarding our methodology, the FBI commented that the number of FBI-sponsored exercises identified in our report was incomplete because we focused on national level exercises. The data included in the report was based on information that the FBI and other agencies provided to us during our review. We provided our list of exercises to FBI and other agencies to review for completeness and accuracy. To the extent the agencies, such as FBI, were not aware of counterterrorist exercises that their field offices led or participated in, we may not have included such exercises in our analysis. FBI also commented that our methodology consisted of a simple tally of conducted exercises rather than a more in-depth analysis of exercise scope, objectives, and number and type of participants. We did perform such an analysis in our February 1999 classified report, which included five recommendations to several agencies (including FBI) to improve counterterrorist exercises.

Scope and Methodology

We focused our analysis on federal counterterrorism exercises in the 3-year period following the issuance of PDD 39. To gather data on exercises, we obtained documents and interviewed officials at the Department of State, DOD, USSS, FBI, FEMA, HHS, EPA, DOE, VA, and ATF. We compiled a list of 201 counterterrorism exercises that were conducted from June 1995 to June 1998. To ensure the accuracy of our list of exercises, appropriate federal agencies reviewed it for completeness and accuracy. We also observed interagency meetings, planning sessions, and exercises. We performed our analysis in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards between March 1999 and May 1999 on data we gathered in 1997 and 1998.

This report is organized into three briefing sections. Section I includes background information. Section II presents our analysis of all federal counterterrorist exercises, including their number, type, focus, scenarios, and participants. Section III presents similar information on individual

agencies. For the four agencies that led most of the exercises, our data is presented in terms of the exercises that they led. For the other six agencies that participated in many exercises, but led relatively few, the data is presented in terms of the exercises in which they participated.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days after its issuance date. At that time we will send copies to appropriate congressional committees, the federal agencies discussed in this report, and to the Honorable Jacob Lew, Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We also will make copies available to other interested parties upon request.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5140. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix I.



Mark E. Gebicke
Director, National Security
Preparedness Issues

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Abbreviations

ATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms
DEST	Domestic Emergency Support Team
DOD	Department of Defense
DOE	Department of Energy
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FEST	Foreign Emergency Support Team
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
PDD	Presidential Decision Directive
USSS	U.S. Secret Service
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Background

GAO Policy and Strategy on Combating Terrorism

- Presidential directives establish policy and strategy.
 - Strategy includes prevention, crisis management, and consequence management.
 - Priority is to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks involving weapons of mass destruction.
-

In 1986, the President formalized U.S. policy to combat terrorism by signing National Security Decision Directive 207, which primarily focused on terrorist incidents overseas. After the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the President issued Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 39 in June 1995, which enumerated responsibilities for federal agencies in combating terrorism, including domestic incidents. In May 1998, the President issued PDD 62 that reaffirmed PDD 39 and further articulated responsibilities for specific agencies. Federal agencies drafted agency and interagency guidance to implement these directives.

These PDDs divide activities to combat terrorism into three elements: preventing and deterring terrorism, responding to a terrorist crisis, and managing the consequences after a terrorist attack.¹ Crisis management includes efforts to stop a terrorist attack, arrest terrorists, and gather evidence for criminal prosecution. Consequence management includes efforts to provide medical treatment and emergency services, evacuate people from dangerous areas, and restore government services. When terrorist attacks occur without adequate threat warning, crisis management and consequence management will be concurrent activities.

One of the highest priorities in the federal government is to prevent and prepare for terrorist attacks that use weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These attacks include terrorist use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons or agents to cause mass casualties. The President (via PDD 39 and PDD 62) and the Congress (via legislation and committee reports) have emphasized the importance of preparedness against this type of threat.

¹Activities to prevent and deter terrorism were not included in the scope of this report.

GAO Counterterrorist Roles and Responsibilities

State leads crisis management and consequence management overseas.

FBI leads domestic crisis management.

FEMA leads domestic consequence management.

Supporting roles are assigned to other key agencies (e.g., DOD, DOE, EPA, and HHS).

PDDs 39 and 62 assigned or reaffirmed lead and support roles to various federal agencies and established interagency support teams. The Department of State is the lead agency for both crisis management and consequence management for terrorist incidents overseas. The State Department would lead an interagency Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) to provide advice and support to U.S. ambassadors, Washington decision-makers, and host governments. For domestic terrorist incidents, the leadership of crisis management and consequence management is divided. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the lead federal agency for domestic crisis management and would lead an interagency Domestic Emergency Support Team (DEST) to provide advice and support to FBI on-scene commanders. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the lead agency for consequence management of domestic terrorist incidents. Other federal agencies such as the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are designated as support agencies that would assist the lead agencies in crisis and consequence management. Depending on the nature of the terrorist attack, these support agencies could be part of the interagency FEST or DEST. Briefing section III provides more detailed information on the lead and supporting roles of specific agencies.²

²In addition to briefing section III, our earlier report provides detailed information on the roles and responsibilities of lead and support agencies. See Combating Terrorism: Federal Agencies' Efforts to Implement National Policy and Strategy (GAO/NSIAD-97-254, Sept. 26, 1997).

GAO Purpose and Types of Exercises

- PDD-39 directed key agencies to exercise their capabilities.
 - Exercises train agency personnel and test their response plans.
 - Interagency exercises enhance coordination and ability to work together.
 - Agencies use both field and tabletop exercises.
-

PDD 39 required key federal agencies to maintain well-exercised counterterrorist capabilities. Exercises test and validate policies and procedures, test the effectiveness of response capabilities, and increase the confidence and skill levels of personnel. Because a federal counterterrorist response is inherently interagency, agencies also exercise together. These interagency exercises enhance coordination among agencies and help them work together. They also allow personnel to become familiar with other agencies' procedures and identify those areas needing further coordination. In the absence of actual operations, exercises are an

important indicator of the preparedness of federal agencies to deal with a variety of terrorist incidents.

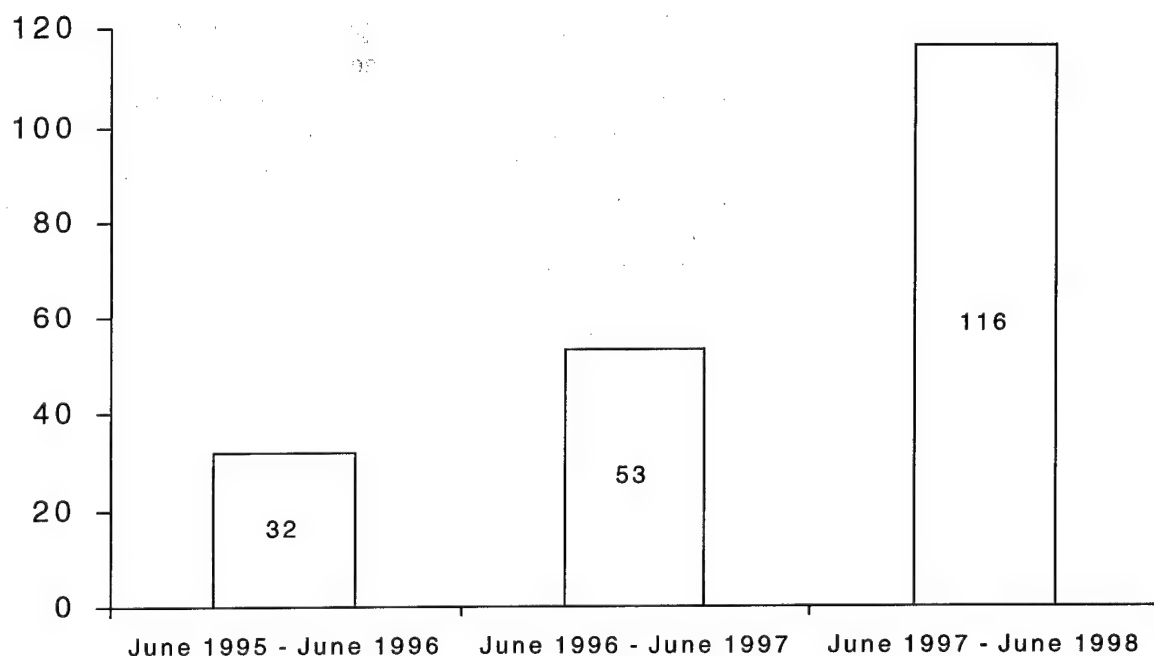
Exercises fall into two general categories, tabletop and field exercises.³ Tabletop exercises are performed around a table, a classroom, or a simulated command post as the players progress through a scenario or series of scenarios and discuss how their agency or unit might react to different situations. Tabletop exercises are used to emphasize higher level policy and procedural issues and frequently include more senior level agency officials. Tabletop exercises are limited to discussions only; there is no actual deployment of operational or tactical personnel or equipment. Thus, tabletop exercises do not test the government's ability to actually use and coordinate personnel and assets in a realistic setting. However, they are a relatively inexpensive and expeditious way to identify and resolve problems in policies and procedures. Given the relatively few logistical requirements, agencies can plan and conduct tabletop exercises within a few weeks or months.

Field exercises are performed in the field under simulated operational conditions. Such exercises focus on performing tasks at the operational and tactical levels and typically include tactics, techniques, and procedures that would be used in a real incident. Field exercises test agency and interagency capabilities to actually deploy personnel and their equipment and coordinate them as they perform their tasks in a realistic setting. Field exercises are generally more expensive than tabletop exercises because they involve more players, increased transportation and other travel expenses, and added wear and tear on equipment. Depending on their scope, field exercises may require up to a year of advance planning to prepare detailed objectives, identify essential tasks, script the scenario, develop an evaluation plan, and schedule transportation and other logistic support.

³Different agencies use slightly different nomenclature to categorize types of exercises. Our definition of tabletop exercises includes "seminar" exercises, "command post" exercises, and "functional exercises." Our definition of field exercises includes "full field" exercises, "full-up" exercises, and "muddy boots" exercises.

Federal Exercises Overall

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises From June 1995 to June 1998

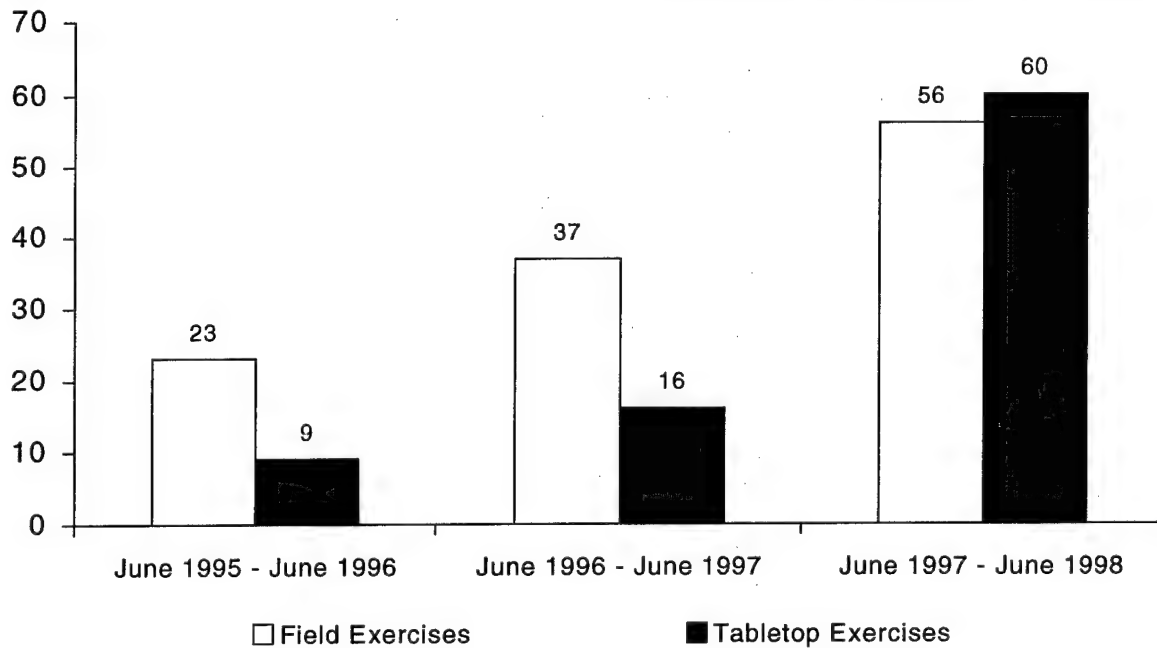


Federal agencies sponsored a large number of counterterrorism exercises in the 3-year period following the issuance of PDD 39. In total, federal agencies sponsored 201 counterterrorism exercises to improve their preparedness for counterterrorist operations. Most of the exercises responded to a domestic terrorist attack and were conducted in the United States, while some addressed international attacks and were conducted overseas. The number of exercises increased from 32 to 116—an increase of 263 percent—over this 3-year period.

The 1996 Defense Against Weapons of Mass Destruction Act, commonly known as the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Act, required DOD to enhance domestic preparedness by providing local emergency response personnel with training and advice. DOD's program to accomplish this, known as the Domestic Preparedness Program, had some impact on the overall increase in exercises. There were 26 Domestic Preparedness Program exercises conducted in the third year, which is 13 percent of all the exercises done over the 3-year period. While we did not collect data beyond June 1998, DOD has continued to sponsor these types of exercises in conjunction with local governments and other federal agencies. We reported earlier on this program.¹

¹See Combating Terrorism: Opportunities to Improve Domestic Preparedness Program Focus and Efficiency (GAO/NSIAD-99-3, Nov. 12, 1998) and Combating Terrorism: Threat and Risk Assessments Can Help Prioritize and Target Program Investments (GAO/NSIAD-98-74, Apr. 9, 1998).

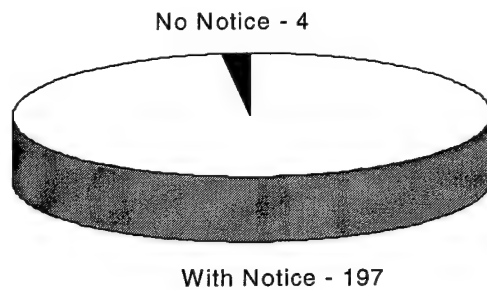
GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Field and Tabletop



As discussed earlier, exercises are categorized as tabletop or field exercises. We found that federal agencies conducted a mixture of tabletop and field exercises. Of the total 201 exercises in the 3-year period, 116 (58 percent) were field exercises and 85 (42 percent) were tabletop exercises. Although field exercises exceeded tabletop exercises overall, the number of tabletop exercises increased at a much faster rate (567 percent versus 143 percent).

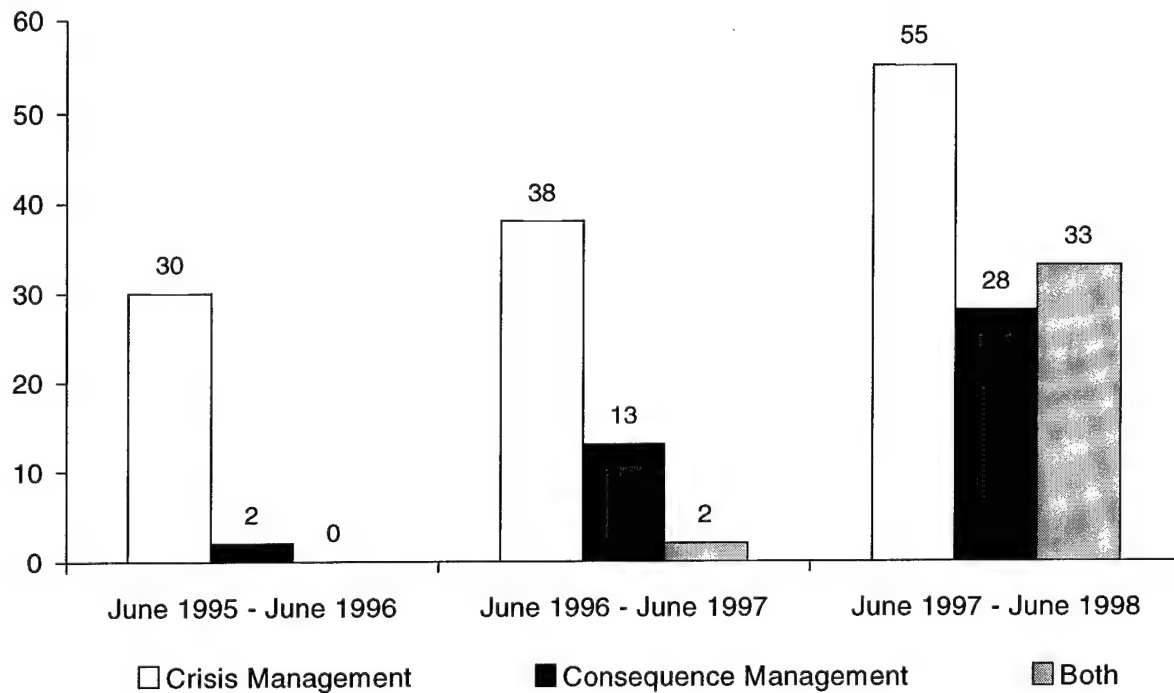
One factor in the increase in tabletop exercises was DOD's implementation of the Domestic Preparedness Program in the third year. This trend may reverse somewhat in future years as program exercises shift from tabletop to field exercises. Some agencies, such as FEMA, relied mostly on tabletop exercises, and others, such as the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), held mostly field exercises. DOD, FEMA, and FBI led the most tabletop exercises during this period and DOD, USSS, and FBI led the most field exercises.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises With Notice and No Notice



Very few of the counterterrorism exercises were conducted without advance notice to the participants. Such exercises, known as “no-notice” exercises, provide the highest degree of challenge and realism to federal counterterrorism teams. Only four (2 percent of the total) exercises had no-notice field deployments of federal personnel and equipment. All of the no-notice exercises had international scenarios and were sponsored by DOD or DOE. They included rapid deployments of command elements and tactical units to locations worldwide and included the FEST to practice supporting the ambassador at a post in a terrorist situation.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Crisis and/or Consequence Management



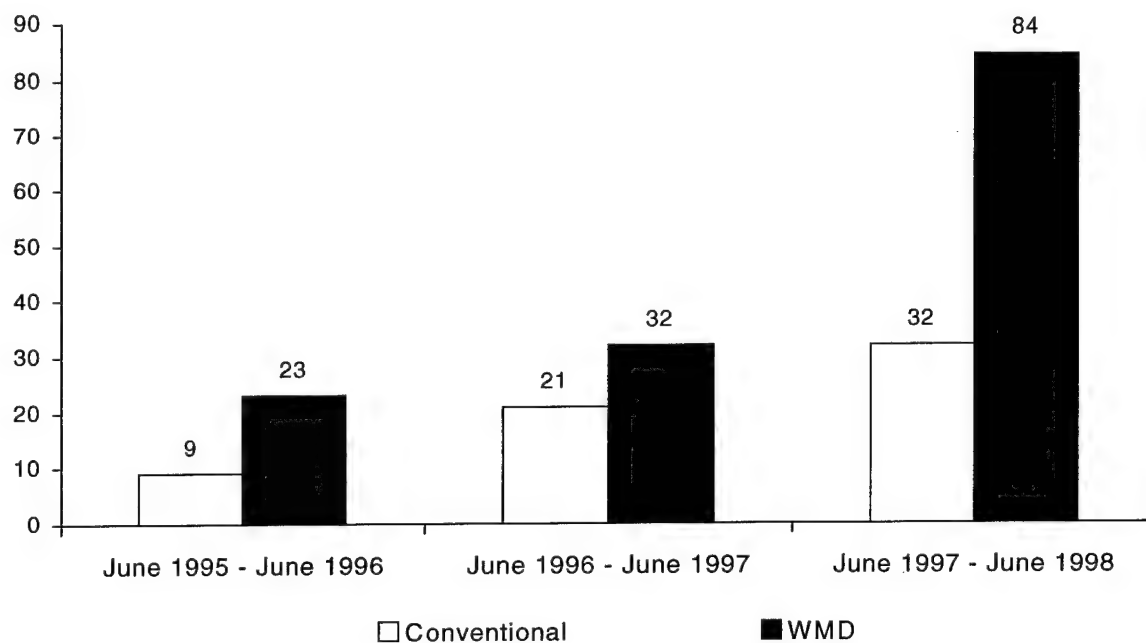
Counterterrorist exercises generally focus on either crisis management or consequence management. While the number of both types of exercises increased, consequence management exercises rose dramatically. Crisis management exercises increased from 30 to 55 (83 percent), while consequence management exercises rose from 2 to 28 (1,400 percent) over the 3-year period. Initially, very few exercises focused on both crisis and consequence management as there were none in the first year and only two in the second year. In a major terrorist incident without adequate threat warning, crisis management and consequence management would need to occur simultaneously. By the third year, however, there were 33 exercises that included both crisis management and consequence management. Of these 33, most of them (26 exercises) were tabletop exercises sponsored by DOD under the Domestic Preparedness Program.

Crisis management exercises include both international and domestic scenarios. Each year, DOD and DOE sponsor several international interagency field exercises. The State Department uses these exercises to practice its leadership role in international terrorist incidents. Domestic crisis management exercises are led by law enforcement agencies and primarily provide training to prepare for crisis response. The FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) have crisis management exercise programs that periodically test crisis response teams and include field office personnel. The USSS conducts many field exercises related to its mission to protect the President and other key officials and to ensure continuity of operations at the White House.

Consequence management exercises generally had domestic scenarios.² FEMA sponsored a series of interagency tabletop exercises that focused on interagency and intergovernmental issues. Other federal agencies, such as DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), have also sponsored consequence management exercises.

²While there have been some DOD and State Department sponsored consequence management exercises with international scenarios, we did not include them in our review.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Conventional and WMD

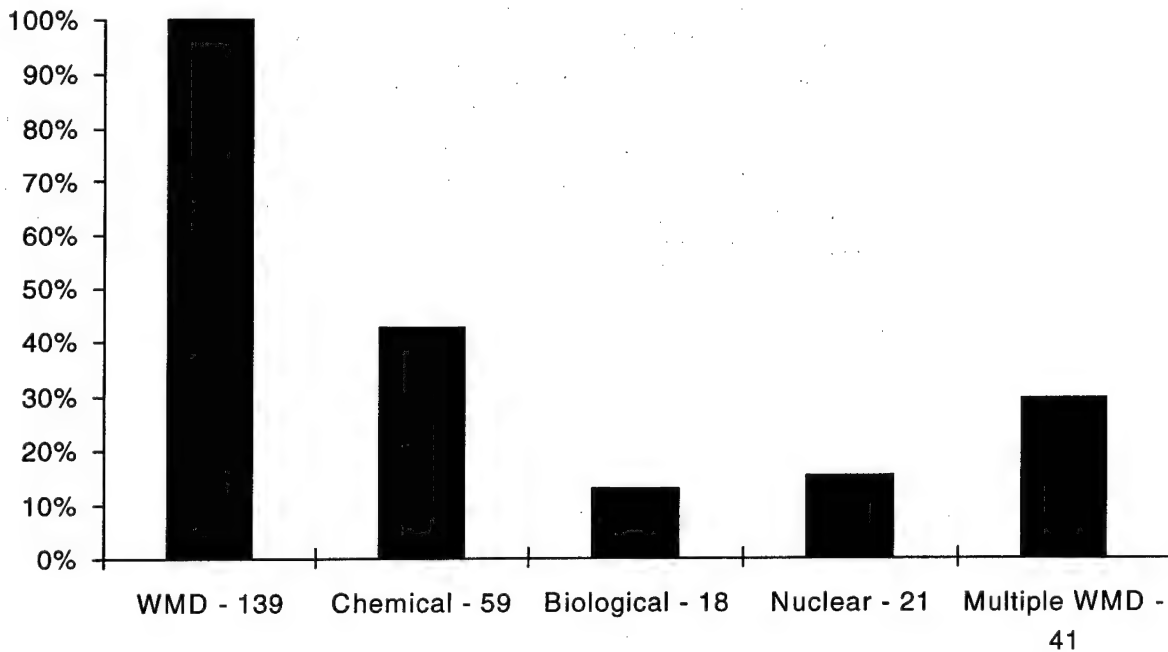


Federal counterterrorist exercises included both conventional and WMD scenarios to prepare their personnel for a wide variety of possible situations. Exercises with both conventional and WMD scenarios increased more than 250 percent over the 3-year period. The ratio of conventional scenarios to WMD scenarios was roughly the same (about 2.5) in the third year as in the first year.³ DOD, FEMA, FBI, and USSS led the most exercises that included WMD scenarios. All of the 26 Domestic Preparedness Program exercises that were conducted in the third year had WMD scenarios.

Although the number of exercises with WMD is more than double those with conventional scenarios, conventional terrorist incidents are more likely to occur. According to intelligence agencies, conventional explosives and firearms continue to be the weapons of choice for terrorists. Terrorists are less likely to use WMD agents, in part, because they are more difficult to obtain, develop, and weaponize or otherwise disseminate. However, the likelihood that terrorists may use chemical and biological materials may increase over the next decade, according to intelligence agencies. DOD led the most WMD exercises (89 exercises), and a high percentage (92 percent) of the exercises that it led had WMD scenarios. DOD officials said that they need to train against the most challenging threat (i.e., WMD) and that such training also prepares their personnel for less challenging conventional threats. Another factor in the relatively high number of exercises with WMD scenarios is the strong emphasis on WMD voiced by the President (in PDDs) and the Congress (in legislation and committee reports).

³To some extent the number of WMD scenarios is overstated because we classified exercises that had both WMD and conventional scenarios as WMD exercises.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Chemical, Biological, and Nuclear

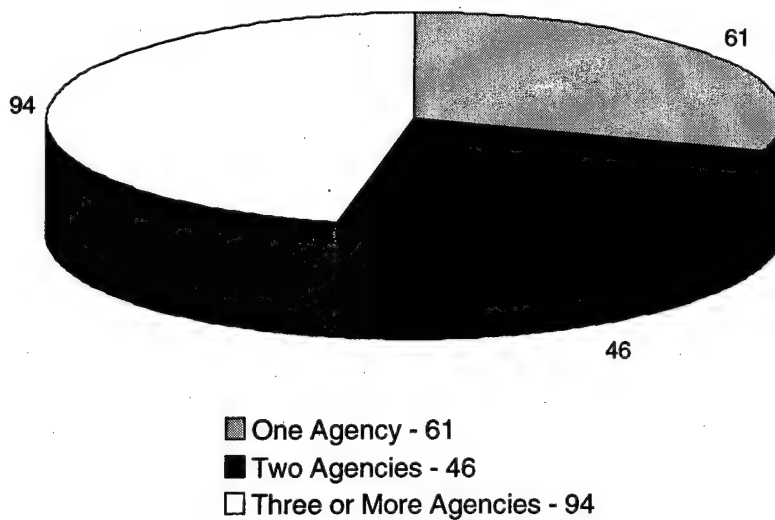


Federal agencies had scenarios that used all three types of WMD (chemical, biological, and nuclear) in their counterterrorism exercises during the 3-year period. Chemical agents, such as sarin, were the most common and were included in 59 (42 percent) of the WMD exercises. All of the 26 Domestic Preparedness Program exercises included chemical agents. Biological agents, such as anthrax, were less common and were included in 18 (13 percent) of the WMD exercises. Nuclear threats (including radiological), such as uranium bombs and plutonium, were included in 21 (15 percent) of the exercises.

In addition, of the 139 WMD exercises, 41 (29 percent) including more than 1 type of WMD in the scenario.⁴ An example of a multiple WMD scenario was a DOD exercise where terrorists teams were at two locations, one team with a chemical weapon and one team with a biological weapon. While DOD officials acknowledged that such a multiple WMD scenario was not likely, they said each individual team in the exercise focused on its individual target, so the training they received at the tactical level was the same as in a single WMD scenario.

⁴To some extent the number of multiple WMD scenarios is overstated because we included exercises in that category if the data indicated they were WMD, but we could not determine the exact type of agent in the scenario.

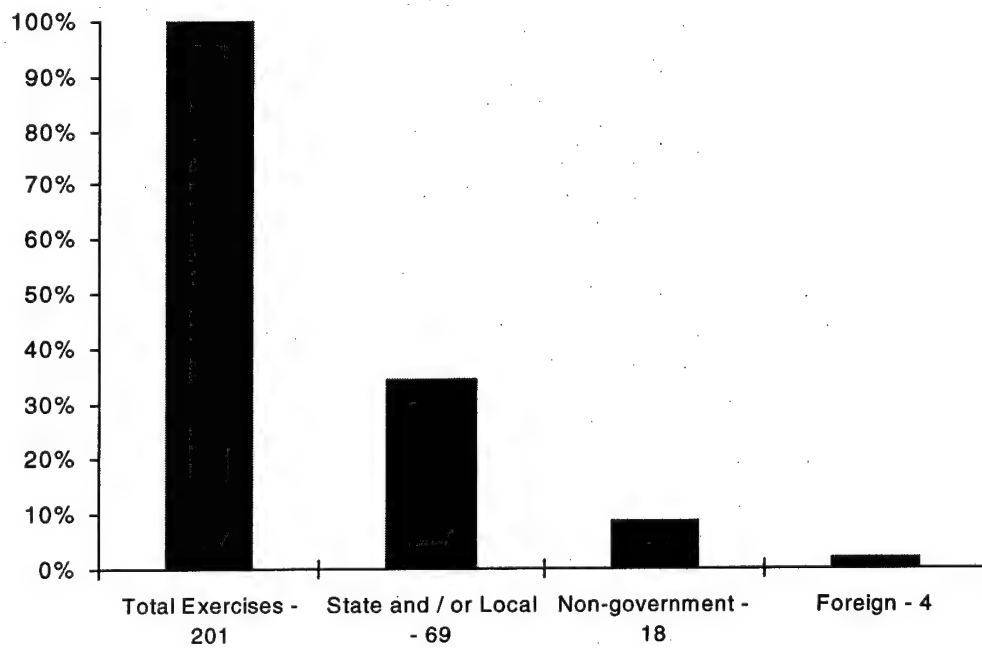
GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Federal Agencies Participating



The number of federal agencies participating in exercises ranged from a single agency to many agencies. Of the 201 exercises, 61 exercises (30 percent) only included the agencies that led them. There were 140 exercises (70 percent) that were interagency exercises—they involved at least 2 federal departments or independent agencies.⁵ Ninety-six (47 percent of the total) exercises were major interagency exercises because they included three or more departments or independent agencies. DOD, FEMA, FBI, and USSS led the most major interagency exercises during this period.

⁵For the purpose of this report, we define "interagency" as involving more than one federal department or independent agency. For example, DOD-led exercises that included both Army and Navy participation, or FBI-led exercises that included other Department of Justice participants (e.g., the Bureau of Prisons) were not considered interagency exercises.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises By Types of Participants

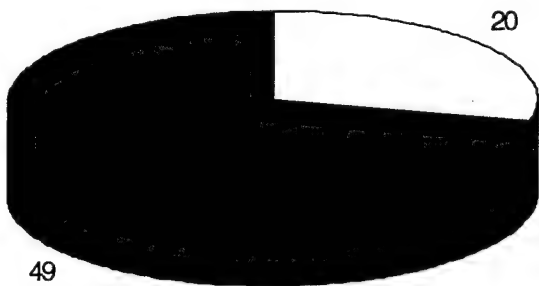


In some of the 201 exercises, federal agencies gained experience working with state and local authorities, nongovernmental organizations, and foreign governments. Of the 201 exercises, 69 (34 percent) had state and/or local government participation, such as police and fire departments. In addition, 18 (9 percent) of the total exercises included nongovernmental or other private organizations. Examples of such organizations include disaster relief charities (e.g., the Red Cross), private firms (e.g., hospitals, airlines, and oil companies), and organizations set up for special events (e.g., the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games). Four of the exercises (2 percent) included foreign government participation and simulated federal agency integration in international incidents. DOD led most of the exercises with state and local participation because of the intergovernmental nature of the Domestic Preparedness Program exercises. After DOD, FBI and FEMA led more exercises with state and local participation than the other agencies.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises

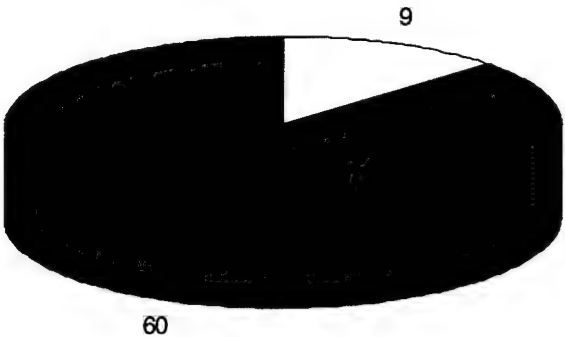
State and Local Participation

Federal, State and / or Local
Field and Tabletop



□ Field ■ Tabletop

Federal, State and / or Local
WMD Versus Conventional



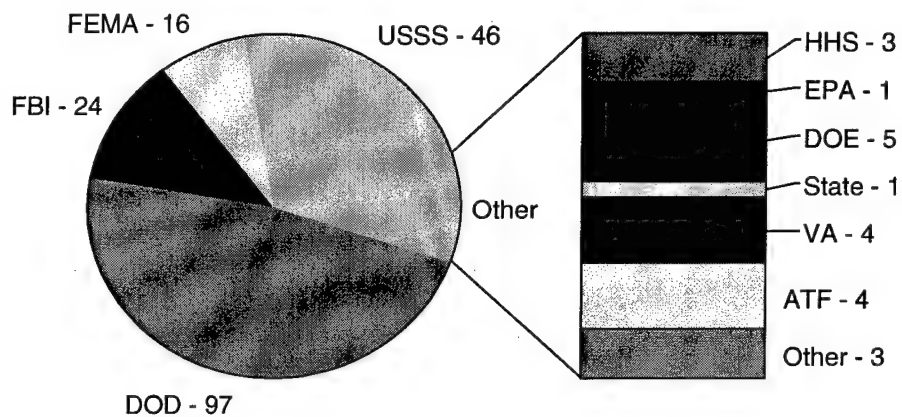
□ Conventional ■ WMD

Federal counterterrorist exercises that included state and/or local participation tended to be tabletop exercises with WMD scenarios. Of the total 69 exercises, 49 (71 percent) were tabletops and 60 (87 percent) had WMD scenarios. The 26 Domestic Preparedness Program exercises (which were all tabletops using WMD scenarios) accounted for 26 (38 percent) of the 69 exercises that included state and/or local participation.

According to the FBI, field exercises offer hands-on training that cannot be replicated by tabletop exercises and valuable opportunities to test interactions among federal, state, and local agencies. For this reason, the FBI views participation by state and local agencies in federally sponsored field exercises as a top priority as it continues to plan and execute counterterrorist exercises. However, staffing and budget considerations or restrictive union contracts sometimes hinder state and local participation in federal exercises, according to the FBI. The FBI noted that it is not budgeted to pay state or local overtime for participation in FBI-led exercises, and until this budget problem is resolved, there will never be extensive state and local participation in FBI-led exercises. The FBI stated that the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs may be able to provide funding for state and local participation in federally sponsored field exercises.

Individual Agencies Exercises

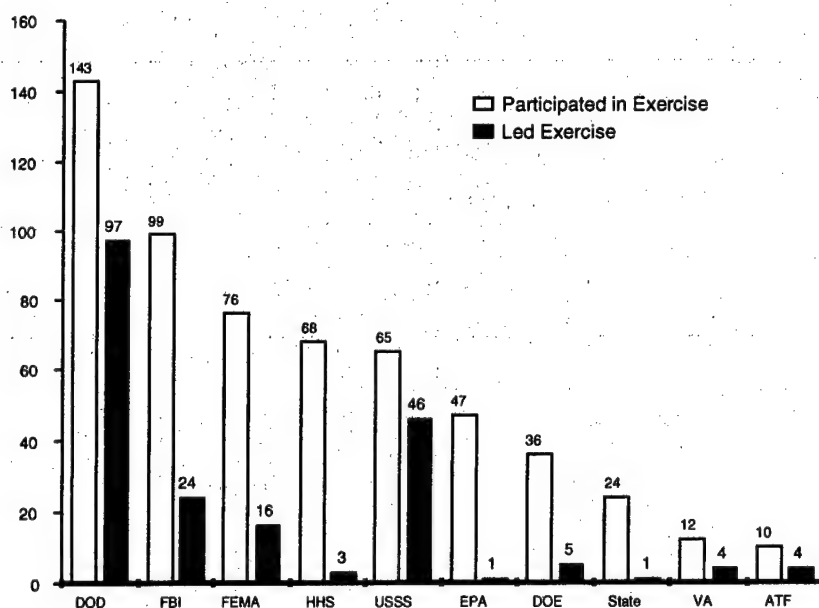
GAO Counterterrorist Exercises By Lead Agency



Federal counterterrorist exercises were generally led by one agency. The lead agency was responsible for planning the exercise, setting the objectives, scripting the scenario, coordinating the logistics, and evaluating the results. Thus, the lead agency usually expended the bulk of the personnel and resources to conduct an exercise. This is especially the case in field exercises, which are more resource intensive than tabletop exercises. The role of agencies that just participated varied by exercise and by agency. Some participating agencies were very involved in exercise planning and provided substantial resources to exercises led by other agencies. For example, in some field exercises, participating agencies attended numerous planning sessions and deployed several personnel and substantial equipment to the exercise location. In contrast, in some tabletop exercises, some participating agencies contributed one or two personnel just for the day of the exercise.

Four agencies led more than 90 percent of the counterterrorist exercises. These four agencies, and the number (and percentage) of federal exercises that they led, were DOD with 97 (48 percent), USSS with 46 (23 percent), the FBI with 24 (12 percent), and FEMA with 16 (8 percent). No other single agency led more than five (2 percent) of the total exercises over the 3-year period. For the few cases when more than one agency led an exercise, we counted all sponsoring agencies as a lead agency; thus, the total in our briefing slide (204) slightly exceeds the 201 exercises conducted during this period.

GAO Counterterrorist Exercises Participation and Leadership by Agency



Some agencies (e.g., DOD, USSS, FBI, and FEMA) not only led many exercises but also participated in many exercises led by other agencies. Other agencies we reviewed led 5 or fewer exercises but participated in at least 10 exercises in the 3-year period. These agencies generally exercise their personnel and equipment through their participation in other agencies' exercises. For example, State Department officials told us that they leverage DOD-sponsored exercises to exercise their counterterrorism responsibilities, including their lead agency status. As discussed earlier, because some exercises were sponsored by more than one agency, the number of exercises that agencies led (204) slightly exceeded the 201 exercises conducted in this period.

Additional information on agencies leading and participating in exercises is provided by the individual agencies in the remainder of this section. For the agencies that led the most exercises (DOD, USSS, FBI, and FEMA), the data is displayed by exercises that each agency led. These agencies are presented in descending order of the number of exercises they led. For the other agencies, the data is displayed by exercises in which they participated. These agencies are presented in descending order of the number of exercises they participated in.

GAO Department of Defense Counterterrorist Exercises

DOD Leadership and Participation in Exercises



□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Type of Exercises That DOD Led



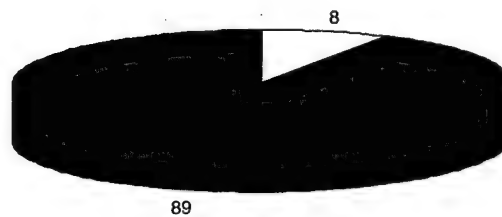
□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Breakdown of DOD-Led Exercises by
Number of Participating Agencies



□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Scenarios for Exercises
That DOD Led



□ Conventional ■ WMD

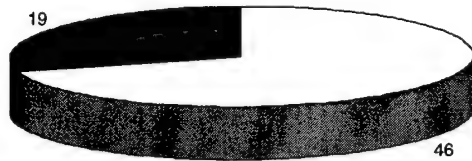
DOD is not a lead federal agency for response to terrorist incidents, but it provides significant and unique capabilities to support other agencies in conducting their responsibilities. DOD works with the State Department to support its international crisis management role. DOD also supports the domestic lead agencies, FBI and FEMA, and other agencies for domestic crisis and consequence management. This support includes not only tactical units but also logistics and technical units trained to deal with all types of WMD. Examples of response units include the Army's Technical Escort Unit and the Marine Corps' Chemical and Biological Incident Response Force.

During this period, DOD participated in a wide variety of counterterrorist exercises and sponsored major exercises with interagency participation. DOD participated in the most exercises with a total of 143, and it led 97 (68 percent) of these exercises. Of the DOD-led exercises, 53 (55 percent) were tabletop and 44 (45 percent) were field exercises. Most included WMD scenarios, primarily chemical weapons, and 62 (66 percent) of the DOD-led exercises included 3 or more federal agencies, many of which included State, FBI, DOE, HHS, and EPA. DOD also sponsored the four exercises that included foreign government participants, as well as three of the four no-notice exercises.

DOD sponsored a variety of major interagency tabletop exercises and field exercises. DOD sponsored the Domestic Preparedness Program exercises carried out in major U.S. cities. This program also included major federal, state, and local field exercises in Denver in 1997 and Philadelphia in 1998. DOD also established the Interagency Terrorism Response Awareness Program, which includes tabletop exercises that bring together senior agency officials within the counterterrorism community to coordinate policy issues. DOD schedules several interagency field exercises, including the Eligible Receiver series, which are sponsored by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Ellipse series, which are field exercises conducted by one of the geographic theatre commanders. These major exercises usually include participation by other federal agencies. For example, in June of 1998, DOD conducted a weeklong WMD crisis management exercise, which included FBI, State, FEMA, DOE, and HHS.

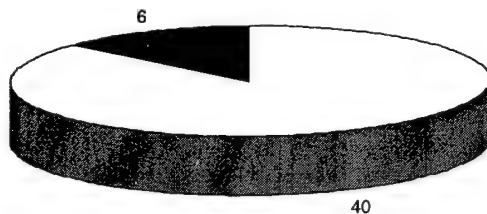
GAO U.S. Secret Service Counterterrorist Exercises

USSS Leadership and Participation in Exercises



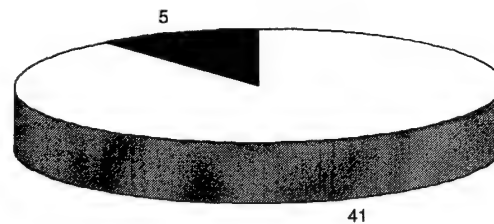
□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Breakdown of USSS-Led Exercises by
Number of Participating Agencies



□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Exercises That USSS Led



□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Type of Scenarios for Exercises That
USSS Led



□ Conventional ■ WMD

Among other responsibilities, USSS provides protection to the President and other key officials. USSS conducted exercises for its special agents related to its protective mission. These exercises generally involved continuity of operations at the White House or protecting the President and other officials. Some of these exercises practiced the USSS role in providing security at certain special events, such as national political conventions, presidential inaugurations, and state of the union addresses.

USSS generally led field exercises with conventional scenarios that had few other federal agencies participating. USSS participated in a total of 65 exercises and led 46 (71 percent) of these exercises. Forty-one (89 percent) of the exercises led by USSS were field exercises and the other 5 (11 percent) were tabletop exercises. Of the 46 exercises that USSS led, 40 (87 percent) of them had only the USSS or the USSS and 1 other agency participating and 6 (13 percent) of them had 3 or more federal agencies. Of the exercises it led, 36 (78 percent) had conventional scenarios and 10 (22 percent) had some type of WMD threat in their scenarios.

USSS-led exercises involve protecting the President and other officials from attacks and are held at a variety of locations, including the White House complex. These exercises include some other federal agencies, such as DOD (the White House Military Office), FEMA, and the U.S. Capitol Police. The exercises that practice defense against attacks on the President and other officials, such as during motorcades, are held at the USSS training center and involve some other agencies as participants or observers. Exercises have been performed with other agencies before some special events, such as the Presidential Inauguration in 1997 and the Summit of the Eight in Denver in 1997.

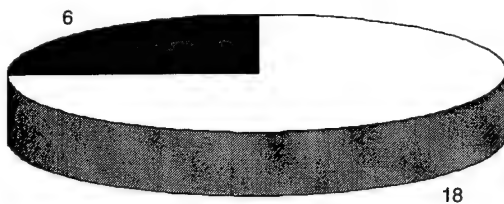
GAO Federal Bureau of Investigation Counterterrorist Exercises

FBI Leadership and Participation in Exercises



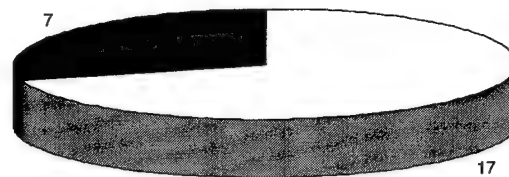
□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Breakdown of FBI-Led Exercises by
Number of Participating Agencies



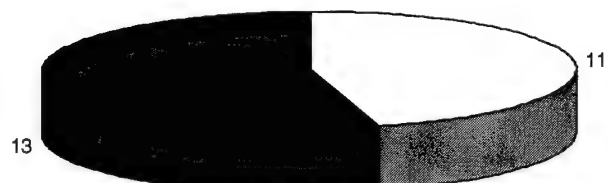
□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Exercises That FBI Led



□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Type of Scenarios for Exercises That FBI
Led



□ Conventional ■ WMD

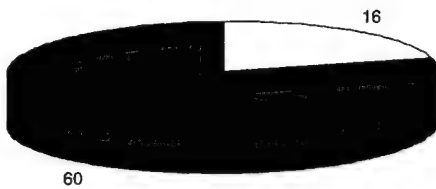
The Department of Justice, including the FBI, has many responsibilities related to terrorism, including conducting criminal investigations, arresting individuals who commit terrorist acts, and prosecuting them. The FBI has been designated as the lead federal agency responsible for domestic terrorism crisis management, including responding to terrorist incidents. The FBI has a variety of operational capabilities that it can deploy to respond to a crisis. Its Critical Incident Response Group can deploy additional resources to assist field offices in responding and is also responsible for sponsoring FBI crisis management exercises. The FBI also can establish a Joint Operations Center to provide for interagency participation in managing a crisis. The FBI can also deploy an interagency DEST to advise and assist the FBI special agent in charge.

The FBI's crisis management field exercises provide training in response capabilities to FBI field personnel. The FBI participated in 99 exercises during the 3-year period and led 24 (24 percent) of these exercises. Even though many FBI-led exercises focus on training for FBI response units, the FBI also led some exercises with participation by several other federal agencies. Of the 24 exercises that the FBI-led, 6 (25 percent) had 3 or more federal agencies participating. The other 18 exercises (75 percent) included only the FBI or the FBI and one other federal agency, as well as some other Justice Department organizations. The exercises also included some state and local organizations. FBI-led exercises included 17 (71 percent) field exercises and 7 (29 percent) tabletop exercises. FBI's crisis management exercises had a variety of scenarios and terrorist threats. Thirteen of the scenarios (54 percent) were WMD and the other 11 (46 percent) were conventional.

The FBI's exercises were primarily crisis management field training exercises that focused on training FBI's operational response units, such as Special Weapons and Tactics teams, and evaluating their response plans. FBI's field training exercises are often held at locations where actual crises could occur and include participants from FBI's field offices. These exercises test command and control by establishing command posts and tactical operations centers and include support, such as equipment, communications, and logistics. The FBI exercises had a variety of scenarios, including hostage barricades, aircraft hijackings, terrorist attacks, conventional bombing attacks, threat of WMD, kidnappings, and prison disturbances. The FBI was also a significant player in some exercises that it did not lead. For example, it played a major role in a June 1998 DOD-sponsored exercise and established a Joint Operations Center with representatives from other agencies, such as DOE, FEMA, and HHS.

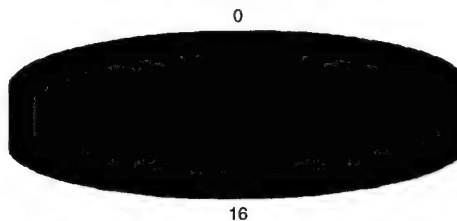
GAO Federal Emergency Management Agency Counterterrorist Exercises

FEMA Leadership and Participation in Exercises



□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Type of Exercises That FEMA Led



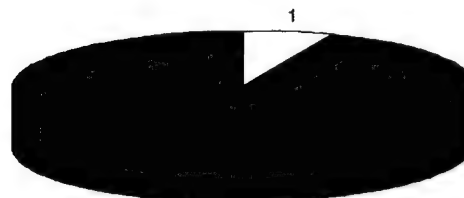
□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Breakdown of FEMA-Led Exercises by
Number of Participating Agencies



□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Scenarios for Exercises That FEMA
Led



□ Conventional ■ WMD

FEMA is the lead agency for coordinating the federal response to manage the consequences of a domestic terrorist attack. FEMA has various emergency response responsibilities for disasters, including maintaining the Federal Response Plan, which includes a counterterrorism annex. FEMA, using the Federal Response Plan, would coordinate the federal efforts to support state and local governments. The Stafford Act¹ provides FEMA with authority to assign missions to any federal agency in the event of a disaster or an emergency declared by the President, including acts of terrorism.

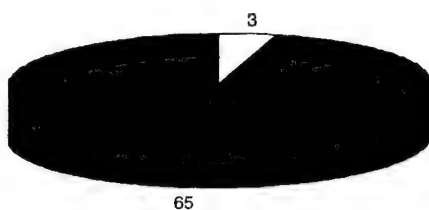
FEMA's counterterrorism exercises focused on its consequence management role, and FEMA also participated in crisis management field exercises led by other agencies. The exercises that FEMA led have generally been interagency tabletops centered on a variety of WMD threats and scenarios. Of the 76 exercises that FEMA participated in, 16 (21 percent) were led by FEMA. Many of the exercises were interagency with 11 of the 16 exercises that FEMA led (or 69 percent) having three or more federal agencies participating. The other five exercises (31 percent) included only FEMA or FEMA and one other federal agency. The 16 exercises that FEMA led were all tabletop exercises. FEMA's consequence management exercises were almost all (94 percent) WMD and had a variety of scenarios and terrorist threats.

The exercises led by FEMA included some major interagency exercises with WMD scenarios. The Ill Wind series of tabletop exercises, which began in September 1996, focused on preparing emergency management personnel to deal with the consequences of terrorism incidents. The scenarios of the exercises involved the use of WMD in the Washington, D.C., area. The FBI and several other agencies provided briefings, and there were participants from many other agencies. More recently, FEMA held consequence management seminars and tabletop exercises for its personnel in each of its 10 regions to highlight terrorism issues, and they included FBI regional participants. The regions chose the scenarios and seven included chemical agents and three included nuclear threats. FEMA also participated in major field exercises led by DOD and FBI to practice planning for consequence management.

¹42 U.S.C. section 5121 et seq.

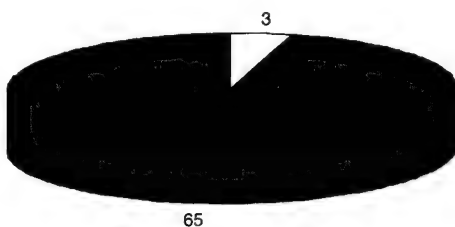
GAO Department of Health and Human Services Counterterrorist Exercises

HHS Leadership and Participation in Exercises



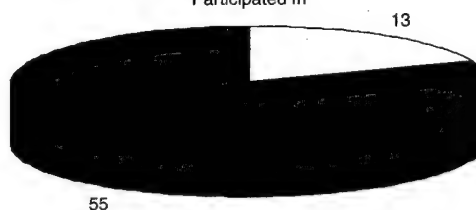
□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Breakdown of Number of Agencies
Participating in Exercises Including HHS



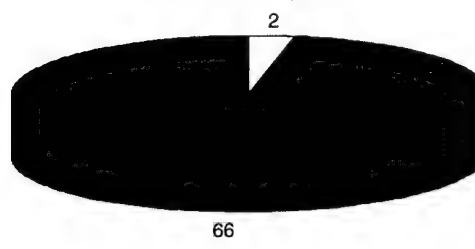
□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Exercises That HHS
Participated In



□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Type of Scenarios for Exercises
That HHS Participated In



□ Conventional ■ WMD

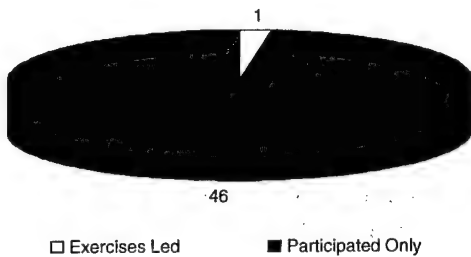
HHS has a support role, related primarily to consequence management, to provide the health and medical response to a terrorist incident. HHS can provide a number of services in a terrorist incident, including threat assessment, consultation, agent identification, epidemiological investigation, hazard detection and reduction, triage, treatment, decontamination, public health support, medical support, pharmaceutical support, overflow hospital capacity, mental health services, and mortuary services. The Office of Emergency Preparedness coordinates the overall HHS support. HHS could activate a number of specialized resources that include the National Disaster Medical System, Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, National Medical Response Teams, and Disaster Mortuary Teams. For biological agents, HHS can help identify the agent and conduct epidemiological investigations through its network of laboratories.

HHS generally participated in tabletop exercises with WMD scenarios that included several federal agencies. HHS led 3 (4 percent) of the 68 exercises it participated in. Of these three HHS-led exercises, two (66 percent) were field exercises, two (66 percent) involved three or more federal agencies, and all had WMD scenarios. Of the 68 exercises that it participated in, 13 (19 percent) were field exercises, 65 (96 percent) involved three or more agencies, and 66 (97 percent) had WMD scenarios.

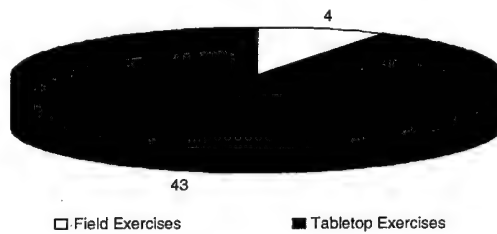
An example of an exercise sponsored by HHS (also cosponsored by DOD and VA) was "Consequence Management 98", which was conducted in April 1998. This exercise included five HHS Disaster Medical Assistance Teams, focused on the medical aspects of a WMD attack, and included training to develop a field medical unit, perform triage, decontaminate patients, and provide additional treatment. The exercise had over 600 participants who practiced their clinical skills in an emergency field setting. HHS officials also stressed the importance of major special events (e.g., inaugurations and sporting events) in exercising their staff's capabilities.

GAO Environmental Protection Agency Counterterrorist Exercises

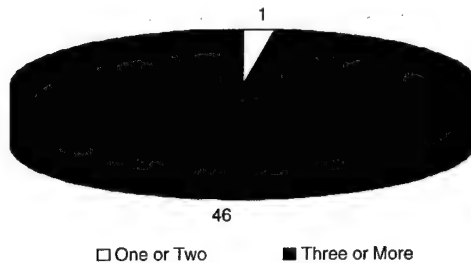
EPA Leadership and Participation in Exercises



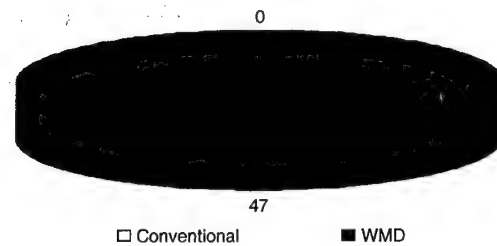
Type of Exercises That EPA Participated In



Breakdown of Number of Agencies Participating in Exercises Including EPA



Type of Scenarios for Exercises That EPA Participated In



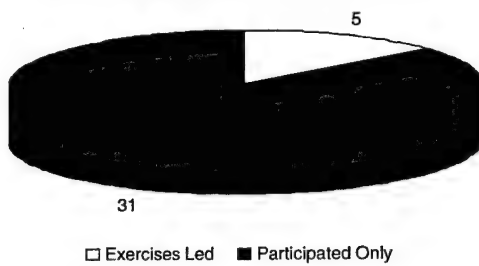
EPA is a support agency for both crisis management and consequence management in terrorist incidents involving WMD. EPA provides expertise and technical support for identification of contaminants, collection and analysis of samples, monitoring of contaminants, on-site safety, and decontamination. EPA also issues permits for the custody, transportation, and transfer of hazardous chemical. The Office of the Emergency and Deputy Emergency Coordinator would coordinate overall EPA support in chemical and nuclear terrorist incidents. Examples of EPA resources include an Environmental Response Team, a Radiological Emergency Response Team, the Environmental Radiation Ambient Monitoring System, and the National Enforcement Investigations Center.

EPA generally participated in tabletop exercises with WMD scenarios that included several federal agencies. EPA led 1 (2 percent) of the 47 exercises in which it participated. The one EPA-led exercise was a tabletop exercise that only involved EPA and used a WMD scenario. Of the total 47 exercises that EPA participated in, 4 (6 percent) were field exercises, 46 (98 percent) involved three or more agencies, and all had WMD scenarios.

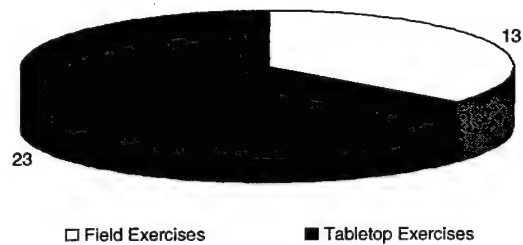
The exercise that EPA sponsored was "Olympic Sparkler" in April 1996. This EPA-only tabletop exercise used a scenario where terrorists dispersed radioactive material at the Atlanta Olympics. The purpose of the exercise was to test EPA plans and procedures to respond to a terrorist incident involving radiation dispersal among a civilian population.

GAO Department of Energy Counterterrorist Exercises

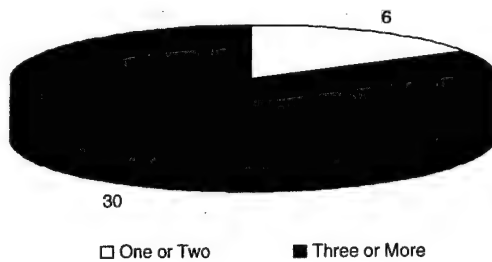
DOE Leadership and Participation in Exercises



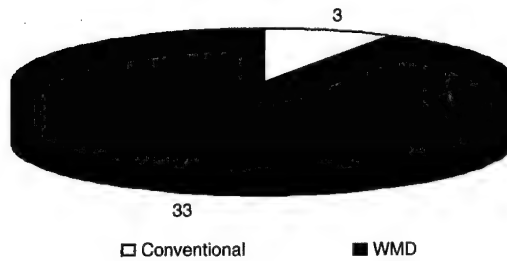
Type of Exercises That DOE Participated In



Breakdown of Number of Agencies Participating in Exercises Including DOE



Type of Scenarios for Exercises That DOE Participated In



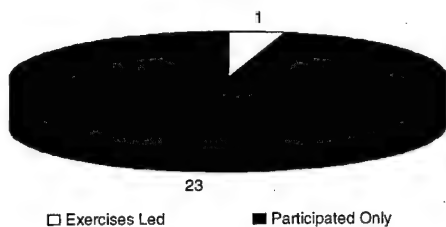
DOE is a support agency in WMD incidents for both crisis management and consequence management, providing support and technical assistance related to nuclear devices and radiological events. Specifically, DOE can provide threat assessments, search operations, diagnostic and device assessments, containment relocation and storage of special nuclear material, and post-incident cleanup. DOE's Office of Emergency Response generally provides coordination of the Department's support. In the event of a nuclear terrorist threat or incident, DOE could activate and/or deploy several teams, including a Nuclear Incident Team, the Nuclear/Radiological Advisory Team, the Nuclear Emergency Search Team, the Federal Radiological Monitoring and Assessment Center, Accident Response Group, the Aerial Measuring System, the Radiological Assistance Program, Atmospheric Release Advisory Capability, and the Radiation Emergency Assistance Center and Training Site. These response teams are composed of DOE employees and contractors who work at DOE facilities as weapon designers, engineers, and physicists.

DOE generally participated in a mixture of field and tabletop exercises with WMD scenarios that included several federal agencies. DOE led 5 (14 percent) of the 36 exercises it participated in. Of the five DOE-led exercises, three (60 percent) were field exercises, three (60 percent) involved three or more federal agencies, and all had WMD scenarios. Of the total 36 exercises that DOE participated in, 13 (33 percent) were field exercises, 30 (83 percent) involved three or more agencies, and 30 (83 percent) had WMD scenarios.

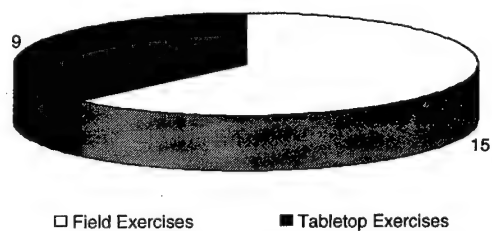
The exercises that DOE led were generally deployments (including one no-notice deployment) of DOE's rapid response capabilities and included personnel and equipment from other agencies as well. Most of them were field exercises that focused on crisis management. Given DOE's role, most of the exercises that DOE led or participated in had nuclear or radiological scenarios.

GAO Department of State Counterterrorist Exercises

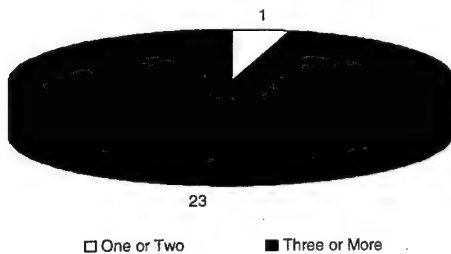
State Leadership and Participation
in Exercises



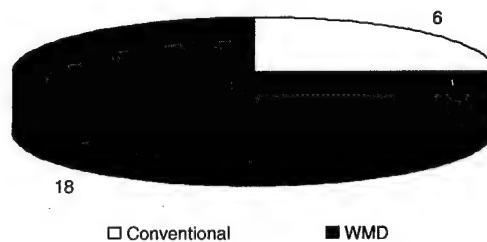
Type of Exercises That State
Participated In



Breakdown of Number of Agencies Participating in Exercises
Including State



Type of Scenarios for Exercises That
State Participated In



The State Department is the lead agency for international terrorist incidents for both crisis management and consequence management. The State Department, through its Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, leads a FEST to provide advice and support to U.S. ambassadors, Washington decision-makers, and host governments. The FEST is an interagency team tailored to the specific terrorist incident that could deploy at the request of the ambassador and with the permission of the host country. The Department determines the composition of the FEST, which could include FBI, DOD, DOE, HHS, or EPA if the incident involved WMD. For consequence management, a Consequence Management Advisory Team would deploy with the FEST to assess the need for follow-on assets that would assist a host government in planning for and managing the consequences of a WMD incident overseas.

The State Department generally participated in field exercises with WMD scenarios that included several federal agencies. The State Department sponsored 1 (4 percent) of the 24 exercises that it participated in. This was a field exercise with participation by several federal agencies that used a conventional scenario. Of the total 24 exercises that State participated in, 15 (63 percent) were field exercises, 23 (96 percent) involved three or more agencies, and 18 (75 percent) had WMD scenarios. In general, the State Department uses DOD- and DOE-led exercises to practice its leadership role in international incidents. These exercises test rapid and no-notice deployments of command elements and tactical units to locations worldwide and frequently test the FEST so deployments can be practiced by the full cadre of interagency players.

The one exercise that the State Department sponsored—also cosponsored by DOD—was a bilateral exercise with another friendly nation. This was a field exercise where personnel and equipment deployed to a foreign country and worked with embassy personnel to practice dealing with a conventional hostage barricade situation.

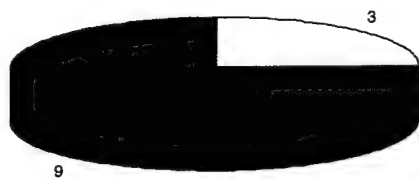
GAO Department of Veterans Affairs Counterterrorist Exercises

VA Leadership and Participation in Exercises



□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Breakdown of Number of Agencies Participating in Exercises Including VA



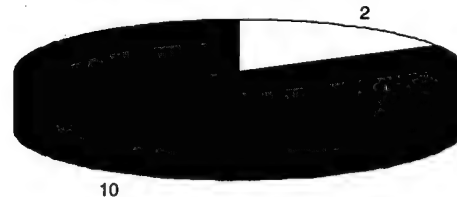
□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Exercises That VA Participated In



□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Type of Scenarios for Exercises That VA Participated In



□ Conventional ■ WMD

VA is a support agency that could provide health and medical support for consequence management. VA works with HHS and DOD to maintain the National Medical Disaster System, a combination of private and government hospitals that could provide health and medical support in a terrorist incident involving mass casualties. Under PDD 62, VA works with HHS to ensure that adequate stockpiles of antidotes and other necessary pharmaceuticals are available for terrorist attacks nationwide. HHS, in consultation with VA, will determine the makeup and size of the pharmaceutical caches for such emergencies.² In a terrorist attack, VA could activate its Response Support Unit to manage the agency's overall response and provide support to other agencies, such as FEMA under the Federal Response Plan. VA also has two response teams, the Emergency Medical Response Team and the Medical Emergency Radiological Response Team. The later team consists of physicians and nuclear physicists that could supplement any federal response to a terrorist threat involving nuclear material.

VA generally participated in a mixture of field and tabletop exercises with WMD scenarios that included several federal agencies. VA led 4 (33 percent) of the 12 exercises it participated in. Of these four exercises, all were field exercises, two (50 percent) involved three or more federal agencies, and all had WMD scenarios. Of the total 12 exercises that VA participated in, 6 (50 percent) were field exercises, 9 (75 percent) involved 3 or more agencies, and 10 (83 percent) had WMD scenarios.

An example of a VA-sponsored exercise was "Radex North" conducted in March 1997. VA sponsored this exercise in conjunction with the state of Minnesota, which simulated a terrorist attack on a federal building with explosives laced with radioactive material, and the subsequent decontamination and treatment of hundreds of casualties. One of the exercise's objectives was to test the concept of operations for the VA's Medical Emergency Radiological Response Team. The exercise had 500 participants and attempted to fully integrate the federal medical response into the state and local responses, including local hospitals. VA officials noted that they participated in numerous other disaster-related exercises (which were outside the scope of our review) to improve the Department's consequence management capabilities.

²VA is not involved in the development of the national stockpile of pharmaceuticals and vaccines. The Pharmaceutical caches referred to in PDD 62 are for medical response teams.

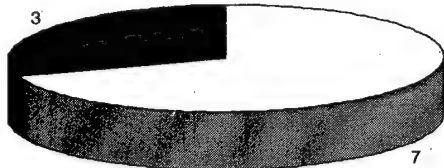
GAO Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Counterterrorist Exercises

ATF Leadership and Participation in Exercises



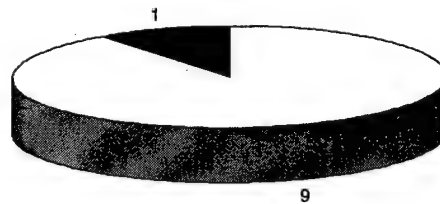
□ Exercises Led ■ Participated Only

Breakdown of Number of Agencies Participating in Exercises Including ATF



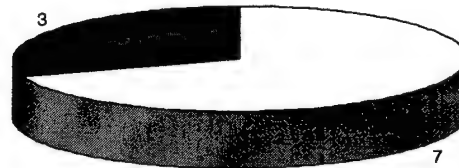
□ One or Two ■ Three or More

Type of Exercises That ATF Participated In



□ Field Exercises ■ Tabletop Exercises

Type of Scenarios for Exercises That ATF Participated In



□ Conventional ■ WMD

ATF has a crisis response role and investigation jurisdiction related to incidents involving conventional bombings. ATF has a Critical Incident Management Response Team that is a standardized deployable command organizational structure for managing responses to incidents, which include acts of terrorism. ATF also has teams that respond and deploy to the crisis site. For example, there are Special Response Teams that provide crisis response.

ATF leads exercises that test the crisis response capabilities of its Special Response Teams. ATF participated in 10 exercises during the 3-year period, including 4 exercises (40 percent) that it led. Of the 10 exercises that ATF participated in, 9 (90 percent) were field exercises. Seven (70 percent) of the 10 exercises that ATF participated in had less than three federal agencies participating in them and had conventional scenarios, including all of the exercises led by ATF; the other three (30 percent) had some type of WMD in their scenario. ATF also participated in six other exercises led by other agencies, including three that had three or more federal agencies participating.

During this period, ATF led field exercises for its regional personnel that included the Special Response Teams in each of the five ATF regions. These exercises focused on developing ATF's internal crisis response capabilities, lasted up to 1 week, and included both classroom training and field exercises. The exercises also included ATF tactical operations centers, response teams, hostage negotiators, communications, and logistics. The exercises had scenarios that generally included domestic antigovernment groups and hostage situations. These exercises included conventional firearms and explosives, not WMD. ATF officials said they have completed field exercises in all ATF regions and are conducting tabletop exercises in their 23 field divisions to update their staff on their new Critical Incident Management System.

Major Contributors to This Report

Carol R. Schuster
Stephen L. Caldwell
Davi M. D'Agostino
Alan M. Byroade
Lee Purdy

Related GAO Products

Combating Terrorism: Observations on Growth in Federal Programs (GAO/T-NSIAD-99-181, June 9, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: Analysis of Potential Emergency Response Equipment and Sustainment Costs (GAO/NSIAD-99-151, June 9, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: Use of National Guard Response Teams Is Unclear (GAO/NSIAD-99-110, May 21, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: Issues to Be Resolved to Improve Counterterrorist Operations (GAO/NSIAD-99-135, May 13, 1999).

Weapons of Mass Destruction: DOD Efforts to Reduce Russian Arsenals May Cost More and Accomplish Less Than Expected (GAO/NSIAD-99-76, Apr. 13, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: Observations on Biological Terrorism and Public Health Initiatives (GAO/T-NSIAD-99-112, Mar. 16, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: Observations on Federal Spending to Combat Terrorism (GAO/T-NSIAD/GGD-99-107, Mar. 11, 1999).

Combating Terrorism: FBI's Use of Federal Funds for Counterterrorism-Related Activities (FYs 1995-98) (GAO/GGD-99-7, Nov. 20, 1998).

Combating Terrorism: Opportunities to Improve Domestic Preparedness Program Focus and Efficiency (GAO/NSIAD-99-3, Nov. 12, 1998).

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